

## **Castle Rock State Park**

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Parks in Illinois have influenced history in many ways. Castle Rock State Park is a park about 3 miles south of Oregon on Route 2. The site for it was picked by a group called “Friends of Our Native Landscape” in 1921. Castle Rock is a nature preserve. It has beautiful scenery and you can picnic, hike, fish, and hunt there. Castle Rock State Park consists of approximately 2,000 acres.

State parks have influenced Illinois history because they get people to come together. Dr. Ted Flickinger states, “In the mid-1800s in Chicago, citizens on all sides of the growing city were banding together to preserve public parks and recreational areas.” Chicago was one of the first places to start parks in Illinois. In 1888, 32 residents from Quincy formed the Quincy Boulevard and Park Association and lobbied hard for public tax levies to acquire and maintain parks. Peoria citizens were the first to petition for official park commission status. Flickinger stated, “Citizens involvement is no less prevalent or important today.” In all these situations people in a community have come together to help preserve nature.

The first people to promote parks were Jens Jenson and Dwight Perkins. Jenson “was a leader in the movement that originated both the forest preserve system and the state park system in Illinois,” according to Jane and Dean Sheaffer. Jenson and Perkins cared about the native landscape. Illinois has a limited number of unique natural areas and unspoiled woodlands, rivers and prairies were growing scarce. They wanted to “help preserve and protect high quality natural areas,” according to Grant Afflerbaugh, park

supervisor. Jenson and Perkins helped organize the Chicago Playground Association. They would have “Saturday Afternoon Walking Trips.” These were to help pay for the parks. In 1913 Perkins got the legislature to enable the forest preserve system. The next year voters approved formation of Cook County Forest Preserve District. Which lead to the beginning of now 13 districts. Sheaffer wrote, “the intent of the regional plan was to make Chicago a better place to live and preserve outstanding natural resources such as native ecological communities, bluffs, rivers, prairies and woods.” In Jenson’s opinion, “The object of park reservations is to preserve scenic beauty in Illinois in its primitive form and hold it as a heritage for generations yet unborn.”

The Friends of Our Native Landscape were the people who started Castle Rock State Park. Of the 20 sites proposed to become parks, 9 were eventually acquired all or in part by the state as scenic and recreational parks and 3 as state historic parks. The park was developed during the Great Depression; hence, getting money must have been hard. It was also hard to get legislation to protect the area. The old way of having historic and scenic parks was over. In 1951, the state parks merged into the Department of Conservation and most new sites for two decades were multi-use recreational facilities. Sheaffer wrote, “the new philosophy would also impact the older scenic parks, refitting them to serve increasing recreational, camping, and lodging needs at the expense of wilderness.”

Before Castle Rock was started “the region was inhabited by Illinois tribes of native Americans until Sauk and Fox tribes being pushed westward by colonists invaded in 1730,” according to the brochure for Castle Rock State Park. Blackhawk, a Sauk chief, led his people into raids to get their land back. In 1832 he was captured and forced

to live on a reservation. Then the Castle Rock area was settled by New Englanders in the nineteenth century. When Castle Rock State Park was first started, the land was mostly in private ownership.

There are a few programs started to fund Castle Rock State Park. “In 1964, the Natural Lands Institute, a non-profit natural lands preservation group, conducted a public fund-raising campaign to preserve part of the Castle Rock area,” according to a sesquicentennial history of Illinois. Most of the money comes from the Department of Natural Resources. It is made for the benefit of everybody in the state so the state pays for it. Funding is provided by tax revenue from hunting and fishing licenses.

To reiterate, parks have influenced Illinois history because they bring people together. Jensen and Perkins were the people who first promoted parks in Illinois. The parks were formed to preserve and protect high quality natural areas. [From “Castle Rock State Park,” *The Story of Oregon, Illinois Sesquicentennial 1836-1986*; Grant Afflerbaugh. E-mail. Oct. 2, 2006; Dr. Ted Flickinger, Ph.D., “It All Starts With Citizens,” September/October 1998. <<http://131.156.59.13/ipo/1998/ip980924.html>.> (Oct. 6, 2006); Illinois Department of Natural Resources, *Castle Rock State Park*; and Jane and Dean Sheaffer, “Designers of Our State Parks and Forest Preserve Systems.” *Illinois Parks and Recreation*.]